

CITY OF NEWARK, NJ'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with James Wallace -- February 27, 1997

Q: Good morning. This is Glen Marie Brickus here at my residence with Mr. James Wallace. Today is February 27, 1997. And it's now about ten-thirty in the morning. And Mr. Wallace, I'd just like to say thank you so very much for coming and being a part of the Scott-Krueger Mansion Afro-American Cultural Center Oral History Project. And again thank you for coming.

Wallace: Thank you for inviting me Miss Brickus.

Q: I'm going to begin Mr. Wallace by asking you to please give me your full name, your date of birth and your place of birth.

Wallace: My name is James Wallace. I was born in 1928 in South Philadelphia.

Q: And what is your occupation? What kind of work do you do?

Wallace: Now I work with an organization called the International Youth Organization for Young People. Plus I'm the Central Ward chairman of the Democratic Party.

Q: What kind of work did you do before you became involved with the International Youth Organization?

Wallace: Well I was self-employed. I used to contracting, painting, carpentry work, mason, that kind of thing. And I owned, at that time I owned a bar in the City of Newark.

Q: Mr. Wallace, how far did you go in school?

Wallace: I finished up to the twelfth grade at St. Mary's in Philadelphia.

Q: Who did you marry, when did you marry, and where did you meet the person you married?

Wallace: Well, the young lady that I married name is Carol Thompson Wallace. I met her at Brick Towers in 1967. 67. We got married like three years later.

Q: Okay. My next question was gonna be how did you meet Carol?

Wallace: I met her, I was working at Brick Towers, and it seemed to be a problem with the young people there. They didn't have anything to do. So we started an organization called the Brick Town Youth Association, and we needed a secretary. She was very good at doing secretary work, typing and stuff, putting papers and things together, so that's how we met.

Q: How long did you know Carol before you and she were married?

Wallace: Oh somewhere like two and a half years.

Q: What kind of work did she do before you and she were married?

Wallace: I think she worked for a company called Booker Real Estate Company. She was a secretary there if I'm not mistaken.

Q: Do you have any children?

Wallace: We don't have any together. She has some. She was married before.

Q: What was your father's name and where was he born?

Wallace: Well, my father, I was told that my father's name Rufus Wallace. I never knew my father. He was supposedly born in [?]

Q: And your mother?

Wallace: My mother was named Marie. Bersame was her last name. She was born in Gildasackerana too.

Q: You have any brothers or sisters?

Wallace: I have a sister older than I am. Her name is Imogene. She was, in fact, Imogene was born in Sackerana too. And right after that we moved, my family moved to Sackerana, I was born in Philly.

Q: I see. And your sister's name was what, did you say?

Wallace: Imogene.

Q: Imogene. And what was your father's occupation?

Wallace: I don't know. When I, my father had passed. I don't know.

Q: What about your mother's occupation?

Wallace: My mother was, what do you call, a housekeeper. She used to clean Miss Ann and Miss, whoever house, do housework.

Q: Okay. She was a domestic worker.

Wallace: A domestic worker. Yeah.

Q: Mr. Wallace have you changed your name? For instance, because of some organization that

you belonged to, or some political reason or?

Wallace: No. Never changed my name.

Q: You've always been James Wallace.

Wallace: As far as I know.

Q: When did you first come to Newark?

Wallace: I first come to Newark in, it must have been around 1950, 51. Somewhere around there.

Q: Why did you come to Newark?

Wallace: I was living in Elizabeth. Elizabeth is, for some reason or another, got a little too small, I think, and so I moved to Newark to a place you called Mulberry Arcade down on Mulberry Street. Nobody seems to know where that's at now.

Q: Mulberry Arcade in Newark?

Wallace: Yes.

Q: Why did you leave, how long did you stay in Elizabeth?

Wallace: I stayed in Elizabeth until I was about twenty, about twenty-three.

Q: Where did you first go after leaving home?

Wallace: Where did I first go after leaving home?

Q: Yes.

Wallace: Well, like I said, I left Elizabeth which was my home, and I moved over to Newark. And I moved into a place they called Mulberry Arcade.

Q: So you came to Newark on your own? You were a young adult at the time you came here.

Wallace: Yes. Yes.

Q: Okay. Okay. Did you or your family know anyone in Newark before you came here?

Wallace: Well, I know someone. A couple of cousins lived here before I came here. And I came over to where they was at. Younger cousins.

Q: Did they encourage you to come to Newark or had they told you what Newark was like before you came?

Wallace: No. I had been coming back and forth to Newark before I made up my mind to move here.

Q: So you had an idea of what to expect when you came to Newark.

Wallace: Yes.

Q: What happened when you arrived in Newark?

Wallace: What happened?

Q: Yeah. How did you find, how did you get your housing on Mulberry Street?

Wallace: Well, when I first came, I moved in with a cousin of mine. He had his own apartment at Mulberry Arcade. It was a couple of rooms. There was only like two or three rooms in this complex. And he had his own apartment, and I moved in with him.

Q: What was the neighborhood like?

Wallace: It was a lot of people. People were friendly. You could go out of your apartment and leave your door open because everybody know each other.

Q: And what year was that?

Wallace: Oh boy. That must be somewhere 51, in that neighborhood.

Q: How long did you stay there, in that particular neighborhood?

Wallace: Oh, about six years I stayed.

Q: What kind of neighborhood was it? Was it commercial or residential?

Wallace: Both. Both commercial and residential.

Q: And what kind of people lived there? Was it mixed ethnically?

Wallace: Mixed. Cause had a lot of Chinese restaurants down there at that time.

Q: What was your impression of the neighborhood when you first moved over there?

Wallace: Well, by coming back and forth before I moved over there, I got to know a lot of people. And it looked like everybody got along. Everybody respected each other.



Q: What was the housing like?

Wallace: It was a cold water flat. You know. We didn't have steam heat and stuff. But it's, like I say, it was nice to the point, the people was nice. Wasn't like the people today.

Q: What kind of rent did you have to pay to live there?

Wallace: Well, I think, if not mistaken, I think I gave my cousin somewhere like twelve dollars something towards the rent.

Q: Where did you live next in Newark after you left there?

Wallace: I lived up on South Orange Avenue. South Orange Avenue, between Wickley and what was that, Boston Street. Yeah. I moved into South Orange Avenue. Into my own apartment. In fact, another one of my cousins who lived there, came and moved with me on South Orange Avenue.

Q: And why did you move to South Orange Avenue? Why did you choose that neighborhood?

Wallace: Well, it was a nice apartment was there, and we were in a nice apartment. In fact, there was an apartment building there at that time.

Q: What was the building like?

Wallace: It was a nice brick structure. But I think it was a, not six floor, six apartments in the building. And they had a store downstairs. It was a nice place that we were, really weren't used to. And it had steam heat.

Q: Had steam heat. What was the neighborhood like?

Wallace: Like I said, it was good people. It was a commercial and residential area. The corner of Whitley and South Orange Avenue, the cleaners. Right next to it, to the building I lived in, a black man had a candy store and a shoe shine parlor. It was nice. People related to each other.

Q: Was that also a mixed neighborhood, black and white living there?

Wallace: Yes it was.

Q: What was the ethnicity of the merchants? You just said a black man had one store there.

Wallace: The cleaners was a black man owned that store too. And then the candy store. I can't remember his name. He used to sell newspapers, that kind of stuff. And up the street, by Boston Street, there was another black grocery store. And a lot of little corner stores and black people owned them.

Q: You know, in more recent years, there has been a lot of resentment on the part of black folk, especially young black people, against white people who own stores in their neighborhood. Did you find any of that kind of thing then? Did black people seem to resent white folk who owned stores in their neighborhoods?

Wallace: No. No. To the point that everybody got along with each other. And you'd go to the store, you didn't have all the money that you should have for a loaf or bread or whatever. They would let you have it. Now. It wasn't as bad as now.

Q: So they did give credit to people in the neighborhood if they needed it?

Wallace: Yes. And everybody knew each other by name and related to each other.

Q: And the fact that you could, they would give people credit when they needed it, did that



influence your shopping with them to any degree?

Wallace: No. No. I had to shop with them because I felt comfortable with them. And as I said, they related to you, they talked to you. You just didn't go in and get a loaf of bread and walk back out. I'm trying to think of the man's name that owned the little store up the street. A white man in the neighborhood. But you got along with each other.

Q: Did you have any relatives in the south, Mr. Wallace?

Wallace: In the where?

Q: Down south. Anywhere in the south.

Wallace: I heard that I had some cousins. I don't know.

Q: But you have never had occasion to visit any relatives there?

Wallace: No. No.

Q: And you would not be familiar with the customs in terms of what they ate, how they ate, and?

Wallace: Well, yeah. Because I have been down south. I've been to Georgia, I've been to Mississippi. I know different places. I know in the morning when you get up they got hot biscuits and syrup and pork chops and gravy. You know, for breakfast. So yeah, I stayed a few weeks and months down there.

Q: So you after you came to Newark, you did not, people did not have, didn't eat that kind of food for breakfast?

Wallace: No. No. But I was in Newark, I left Newark and went down south on vacation. But I wasn't used to hot biscuits in the morning with syrup and pork chops. But that's the way they eat down there.

Q: What other kinds of things did you notice, lifestyles that people did there, things that they did there that they did not do in Newark?

Wallace: Well, they spoke to you. It always was good morning, how do you feel. In Newark, a lot of times, you would get some people to do that in Newark, but then you'll find out they would put barriers out. But down there, whether they know you or not they'll speak.

Q: Did black folk to be helpful to one another in Newark when you came here to live?

Wallace: Yes and no. And if you lived in, like I moved to the apartment building, six families, we got to know everybody and everybody know each other. And it got to be a very good thing, because it protect your home when you went out. If you went out, the other five families know that you not home and somebody come looking for you or going to your door, they could tell, you know. Back in those days, we related to each other. I think now we got too busy or something.

Q: Would you say that you or other people that you knew were a part of an extended family? That is people that had a kind of family relationship although they we were not related by blood?

Wallace: Oh yes. Oh definitely. Yes. That's how we related to each other. Because you stood outside, and like I said, you talk to each other. You related to each other. If Mrs. Jones was sick, you all know it. So you go by and see what you could do for her. You go to the store for her. Or you vacuum clean the house. That's what it is.

Q: As a young person, did you call older people uncle and aunt even though they were not related to you? And like we did in the south, an older person was always Aunt Mary or Aunt Sue

or.

Wallace: Well, I know that a lot of times a person would be called Aunt Sue or Aunt Sally, whether they related to you or not. But like I said, I think that came from the south. Most of the people that migrated in Newark were from the south.

Q: When you first came to Newark, how were holidays, like Christmas and Easter, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, celebrated? Were there family gatherings or get togethers, or did people gather together even though they may not have been family members, to have dinner together on those days or to celebrate those days together?

Wallace: Like I said, me and my cousins were living together. And, you know, we didn't want for anything. We went from house to house. As ate as much as you wanted, and people made you feel very comfortable. Whether you got Christmas presents or not, you felt comfortable, because people related. We used to related to each other. That's what I don't understand today. How people are getting away from, even not speaking to each other. And if you do, it's always why you speaking to me. You know. But years ago, that was something. Christmas, you didn't have to worry about no presents because you go to anybody's house and you get something.

Q: How did the use of items such as liquor and drugs and tobacco, etc., how, did people use a lot of that kind of stuff in the neighborhood when you first came here?

Wallace: Well, there must have been drugs in the neighborhood, but I don't remember seeing no drugs. Maybe, every now and then you see somebody smoke a reefer. The majority of things that I noticed back in those days was the, what they call it, muscatel wine.

Q: Muscatel?

Wallace: Yeah. I think that's what they call it. But, and now, even as a young man and they

were out drinking their wine, they would say, he boy, get away from here, you can't stand here. And that was the wine drinkers. And now the liquor drinkers, they either did it in their houses or in the bar. Very seldom you see anybody drinking liquor. And the winos used to go in the alleys to do it.

Q: Like the people sit all on the front porches or anywhere with a bottle and brown paper bag. Now you see it all over the place.

Wallace: Not back in those days. They had respect for themselves and for the youths.

Q: Did people use home remedies or patent medicines and midwives when children were born during those days when you first came here?

Wallace: Well. Yes. Yes. If you have a cold, I remember one remedy is for colds you put Vicks salve on your body and cover up. And sweat it. If you had head cold, you put Vicks salve in a hot pot of water and put a rag over your head and put your head down there.

Q: Right. Inhaling the vapor. Were children born at home or did women go to the hospital to have babies then?

Wallace: I don't know. I couldn't tell you because my wife, I wasn't married at that time. But I think a lot of babies was born at home I think.

Q: Did you know anybody who believed in conjure and voodoo and whodo and roots and all that of that kind of stuff?

Wallace: If I did, I didn't notice.

Q: What about pets, Mr. Wallace? As you grew up, did you have pets?

Wallace: I had a dog. We kept a dog.

Q: And since you grew up, have you owned any pets?

Wallace: Yeah, a dog.

Q: You got a dog now?

Wallace: Yes.

Q: How did the incidents of crime in Newark, what was it like when you first came here?

Wallace: Crime was very, very little. You didn't see that much crime. Once in a while you might hear of somebody robbing somebody or something. You didn't hear of them killing each other. And I know we used to go into a bar they called the Long Bar, it's still on Mulberry Street, and you could have a five dollar bill, and back in that day five dollars was a lot of money, and you could buy a drink and leave your money on the bar and walk out, and when you come back either the bartender would have it or it would be there. You know.

Q: What about crimes involving juveniles?

Wallace: No. Because young people back in those days were scared to do anything cause if the parents didn't get them, the community people would get them. If not, the police would get them. So they was really too scared to do any kind of crime.

Q: What was your perception of black folk helping one another in Newark?

Wallace: At that time they did that. We ate together, we played together, we slept together, we went places together. Oh yeah. There was an extended family, like you said before, it was an

extended family. Everybody know what everybody else was doing.

Q: How were overall relations with whites in Newark, what was the overall relationship between blacks and whites in Newark?

Wallace: Well, like I said, if you lived in the community, even the one that we was in, there was certain areas that the blacks was there. If it was a white fellow or white person in that, owned a business in that community, you got to know that person. But outside of going off of South Orange Avenue, even Springfield Avenue, Prince Street was where your markets and things was. If you went there, you got to know the man that sell the chickens and stuff like that. But that's the only way I see they really got along years ago is by relating to each other because they were trading off something. They were buying something from each other.

Q: When you first came to Newark, did you know of any traditions that were primarily black traditions in the south that people still did when they came here to live?

Wallace: To relate to each other, to speak to each other, to try to help each other. That's the only thing that I. Because just like I said, I don't know that much about the south. All I know is when I went down on vacation how friendly people were. And then you notice a lot of people that was up north here was the same way.

Q: So how were you received or treated by black folk who had lived in Newark for a long time?

Wallace: Some I was received good, some they didn't care one way or the other. But the majority of blacks back then we related to each other. Although we didn't have nothing, but we got along with each other.

Q: What was your first job in Newark, Mr. Wallace?



Wallace: My first job in Newark. Oh boy. I think my first job, well I was working, I know my first job was painting somebody's apartment because I was working for myself for a long time. And I went down on Market Street and got a job at a place down there called Door's Shoe store. And I stayed there for years.

Q: What did you do there?

Wallace: Well, I would clean it. Well, hired me as a maintenance, then I was hired as a stockboy and then I ended up being a shoe salesman.

Q: How did you get that job?

Wallace: I walked in his office and asked the gentleman was he hiring.

Q: How far was that job from where you lived and how did you get to work?

Wallace: That job must have been about nine blocks, ten blocks from where I lived then. I walked.

Q: What were the working conditions like?

Wallace: Good and bad. We had about three or four other shoe salesmen there. I think I was the only black, and sometimes it's kind of rough. Sometimes you had to go and sit by yourself and eat by yourself. And it wasn't the owner of the store, it was the salesmen. They wouldn't relate to you. And then after a while, they got to the point where they see you weren't going away and then they start relating to you.

Q: What were your wages like?

Wallace: Oh, very small. But at that time, you could live with that type of wage. You got a percentage. First you got a salary. And it was up to you how much you could really make because of the percentage.

Q: What kind of hours did you have to work on a daily basis?

Wallace: Monday, Tuesday was from 9 to 6. Wednesday you worked from 9 to 9. It was a long day. And then the rest of the, Thursday from 9 to 6, Friday was from 9 to 9, and Saturday was 9 to 6.

Q: So you worked six days a week.

Wallace: Yes.

Q: Were any of the people who worked, did any of the people who worked there come from the south?

Wallace: No. I doubt it. Because like I say, I was the only black person there and most of them, and the rest of them was basically Jewish people.

Q: Now you talked a little bit about how the degree of discrimination when you first went there, other than the fact that there was no social interaction between you and the other workers, how well did you get along with them?

Wallace: Well, as far as shoe salesmen, the only thing I would have to ask one of them is do you have size seven and a half shoe in stock that I need. But as far as socialize with them, very seldom we socialized. You know, a lot of times we were so busy, no, no, we weren't so busy, a lot of times we just didn't socialize.

Q: How were you treated by your supervisor?

Wallace: Mr. Klein. That was his name. Mr. Klein was a man that always had answers for any problem that you had. For instance, the race issue. Okay. I never forget one day, Mr. Klein, I came to work and Mr. Klein came over and he cried on my shoulder. And I asked him, what's wrong with you. His son was giving his graduation, and he invited a black boy, a Chinese person, what the place called, Seagirt, and he paid for the hall and what happened, the man told him that his friends, the Chinese boy and the black boy couldn't come. So the boy said, well, if they can't come, then I'm not going to have it here. So the man said, no problem. He gave him his money back. And Mr. Klein, I used to tell Mr. Klein about the problems that we were going through. And he would say, oh well, we didn't understand. So when he came and cried on my shoulder that day and told me about his son, that they put his son out of a Jewish place because of this, then I told him that he didn't understand. But now, since the shoe is on his foot how do he feel. It must have hurt because he was crying.

Q: Did he treat you the same as he treated the other fellows that worked in the shoe store?

Wallace: No. No. Not really. Not really. Because a lot of times, they would have a conversation off on the side and I'd be sitting in the chair somewhere. Never. That's the first time that he really ever speak like that as my supervisor.

Q: Did he reserve, did the white fellows who worked there do certain kinds of work that you were required to do or did you do work that they were not required to do?

Wallace: Right. Well, I had to sweep the vestibule out, and I guess somebody went out there and throwed up or whatever, and that was my job to go clean it up. To make sure the sidewalk stayed clean and to make sure the windows were wiped off. All the others, all they had to do was sell shoes.

Q: I see. There was no union in that store, right?

Wallace: No.

Q: What was your next job after you left the shoe store?

Wallace: Oh, yeah. That's when I had my own bar. I opened up a bar.

Q: Oh. Was it successful?

Wallace: Yes. Until the riots. The day of the riot, the State Troopers came in and tore it up.

Q: Did you ever do any casual or part time work?

Wallace: No that I can remember.

Q: Were you ever unemployed?

Wallace: Yes. From the shoe store for a while. Business got slow, you know, last hired, first fired. But I think it was about, oh about six weeks, I think it was about six weeks I was layed off.

Q: How did you manage during that time? Were you making any money anywhere else?

Wallace: Well, we collected unemployment.

Q: I see. What were the common occupations for black men and women in Newark when you first came here?

Wallace: Well, for the black men it was digging down on foundations and the houses. Painting,

carpentry. For the ladies, I don't know. I think it was.

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Q: Mr. Wallace, I was asking you about the kind of work that black men and women did in Newark, and I believe you said that black men did work like preparing foundations for buildings. And women did mostly domestic work. But were there factories in, you know, factories where black men worked?

Wallace: Yes. Because I'm glad that you brought me back. I worked for a factory called American Steel years ago. On, what was that, Avenue L, somewhere down there. And a lot of black men worked in foundries.

Q: Also at that time there was a lot of leather works down, up and down Vreclinhisen Avenue I believe.

Wallace: I heard about it. I didn't do any of that. But they call it pulling leather or pulling hides or something. Yes. A lot of black people doing that.

Q: Of all of your experiences, did you gather any pictures, any photographs or, during those days, you had not gotten into the community kind of work that you did later. So citations and awards and what not, you hadn't gotten any of those up to that point.

Wallace: No.

Q: What church do you belong to, Mr. Wallace?

Wallace: Well, really, no church. I go to any church I feel like going to and whenever I feel like going.

Q: Do you go to church regularly?

Wallace: Well, I make it my business to go to church at least twice a month. At least twice. But basically, my religion, my belief is I know there's a supreme being due to the things that I have went through. I pray every day, every day. Because my goal is to try to help people, and for me to do that, I got to get the strength from God to be able to help somebody else.

Q: Now you said you do not belong to a church, but you go to church regularly. Can you think of any minister --

Wallace: Oh yeah.

Q: -- that you think would be an outstanding person, outstanding pastor or minister?

Wallace: Well, the one that I can think of has passed. Was Reverend Shorter. He used to be at New Eden on South Twelfth Street.

Q: New Eden Baptist Church?

Wallace: Yeah. But he had passed. He was a preacher, minister that I really respected. Any time that you went to him with a problem, he had time to talk to you. Any time. Wherever. I respect that.

Q: How much have you participated in social and cultural activities in Newark?

Wallace: Well, that phase of my life it was with people in the City of Newark. I've been doing that for now about thirty-six years, about thirty-six years.

Q: Do you belong to any social or cultural organizations, such as the Elks or the Masons or bridge



clubs or literary societies and that kind of thing?

Wallace: Yeah, well, I don't belong to the Elks or the Masons. I belong to other organizations. Like the Leaguers, you know, different organizations like that.

Q: Do you remember when you first joined the Leaguers?

Wallace: No. It's been years.

Q: What kind of activities, what kind of things did the Leaguers do?

Wallace: Well, we have meetings about problems. Trying to solve some of the ills of the City of Newark, or some ills of the black people that have a lot of problems. And there's a lot of meetings. They try to do things.

Q: Did you hold any office or position there at the Leaguers?

Wallace: No. I didn't.

Q: What do you consider to be the major accomplishment of the Leaguers?

Wallace: Like I said, help the people.

Q: Who was the founder of the Leaguers? Do you remember? It was a doctor.

Wallace: Doctor. Oh, I can't think of his name. Dr. Birch. Birch?

Q: Birch.

Wallace: Yeah. I think it was.

Q: Mary Birch.

Wallace: Yeah. Mary. Dr. Birch and Mary Birch.

Q: I think I remember such people as Donald Payne and some of the other young black folk who have become outstanding citizens or accomplished quite a bit were members of the Leaguers. They were a social organization, a social development organization, as well as being an organization that provided such --

Wallace: Services.

Q: -- services. Yeah. How much have you participated in political activities in Newark?

Wallace: Oh boy. Here we go. Well, that's another thing. If you live in Newark, you have to be. See, what I try to tell people. When you go to bed at night and the next morning you get up and God wake you up and you put your foot on the floor, politics take over your life. I try to explain to people you have to be involved in politics. So, I'm out there trying to pass the word, get involved in what controls so much of your life. Politics controls ninety-five percent of your life. So you have to be involved. Especially young people. Seniors is very active in politics. A lot of time they exploit it, but a lot of times, most time, they'll go out and vote. Our young people are the ones that could make a difference, could change a lot of stuff, could better a lot of stuff, if they would understand that politics controls their lives.

Q: What specific things have you done politically in Newark?

Wallace: I registered people to vote. I take people to go vote. I explain to people why they should vote. I ran, at the last, I usually don't run for any office. I usually try to put people in places to

run. But I ran for something they call the Central Ward Democratic Chairman. I ran for that and won it. And I'm trying to make a difference. But it's kind of hard to the point that you have so many factions you have to deal with in this political arena.

Q: So you're still Chairman of the Central Ward Democratic Committee?

Wallace: Yes. As of now.

Q: And what precisely does the organization do?

Wallace: That's a good question, that's a very good question. To the point that I'm still trying to find out. I know that they was told, she was told that we sort of work for the Democratic Party, for the candidates that they pick to help that person. Which I have no problem with that. The problem that I have is that person that runs for office that the Democratic Party pick is not the people that put us in office. And what I'm trying to see when do we relate to the people that put us in office. Now, I remember years going back, when Irving Turner and all them was here. When you had a district leader, and a district leader could make a difference cause a district leader could go and try to get apartment for you, get you food stamps. And God forbid if your son or daughter went to jail, they could get your child out of jail. Today, I don't really know what it is that the district leader could do outside of work for the party.

Q: What kind of specific activities does the district leader do now? You talk about when it used to be, the things that they once were able to do. And I know that things have changed drastically since I first became involved in politics over here. Now what do district leaders do? Do you think that the district leader has the initiative to help like district leaders used to have?

Wallace: The majority of them do. But, you know, it's like anything else. You keep bumping your head against the wall, the wall is not gonna move; your head is gonna get sore. And they keep trying to do something, but they don't get any help. So they just do like everybody, get

complacent and say the heck with it. No. The majority of them, not saying all of them, because some of them run on the recognition of the name. You know. But the majority of them will try to do something. They keep trying, they keep trying, they keep trying. That's why they just said, hey, I had enough.

Q: So when did you first become chairperson of the Central Ward?

Wallace: Oh, what year was that? About 92 I think.

Q: How much have you participated in community activities, Mr. Wallace.

Wallace: Well, I'm. I have to go back to what I really tell you about the bar on South Seventh Street. There was a bunch of young fellows hanging around there. And I went in there and we talked to each other cause they didn't have nothing to do. And we started a little organization called American Black Brigade. And what we used to do is I got money and bought them uniforms. And we used to walk up and down, march up and down the South Seventh Street. And we'd clean up the community and stuff like that. And then I left there. I went up to South Eighteenth Street and Sixteenth Avenue, where it was a nice neighborhood, I mean, it was really nice. And I started an organization up there called the West Side [?] Association. And what we did was problems with people and try to straighten out people's problems. And then I left and I went to Brick Towers. I was working at Brick Towers and I found out that most of the problems with the young kids, the young people and why that was a problem was they didn't have nothing to do. They built this great big building with no playground or no recreation or no nothing for the kids. So the kids was riding up and down the elevator and marking the walls. So I went, this was in 1970, we started a group with thirteen young people called The Brick Tower Youth Association. It had a drill team. We made the kids do their homework, and we'd go to places for the drill competition and things like that. And then it go the point like everything else, it started getting bigger. All the kids around the neighborhood, Stella home, Stella Wright, all wanted to come. And then it got like, you know, like we usually do, it's all right to help me, but you can't help nobody

else. Okay. So then the people had us put out of the building. So we had to leave. We didn't do nothing but go up and down the streets for a few years, about two years. Then we got another building on High Street. The Red Cross let us come in there. And we used to have lunches, set up lunches and stuff, but the most important thing was to make sure that young people do their homework and have something to do positive. Okay. So at that time, that was called the Brick Tower Youth Association. And like I said, all the people there wanted us to help was their kids. But that wasn't what it was about, it was about helping everybody's kids if possible.

So then we had to leave, and then we changed the name to the International Youth Organization. Which was very, very hard. I think we started with, I know we started with thirteen young people. And down through the years, I know we have anywhere in the neighborhood of ten thousand kids. Anywhere in the neighborhood. And this is not only black kids. White, Spanish, whatever. No matter what your nationality is, a problem is a problem. And if you come to us, we're gonna try to help you with your problem. But it's very hard. And it's still hard. We have a program that definitely should be in the neighborhood of four million dollars a year. We get nowhere near there. Nowhere. Right now we have young people in the program that are trying to get their GED, that dropped out of school and are standing on the corner selling drugs, young girls pregnant. And they come there every day. So we must be doing something right. But if we don't start doing something a lot better, I think the door is gonna be closing.

Q: Mr. Wallace, where is the International Youth Organization located now?

Wallace: 703 South Twelfth Street, on the corner of Woodland. One block in off of Springfield Avenue. One block in off of Aline Avenue.

Q: And what kind of facilities do you have there?

Wallace: Well, we have a two floor structure brick building. Right now, we have five buildings and believe it or not, we're out of space. That's how many kids we have here. We have young people that come into the Youth Corps, the Merit Corps. They run from the age of sixteen to

twenty-four. Then afternoons we have young people come there from the age of five to the age of sixteen or seventeen. That's in the afternoons. They need help with their homework and stuff.

Q: I will never forget the summer that I worked over there with you, and that was, I suppose, some eight years ago now. And I notice that you've done a lot of improving of the buildings, and I want you to tell me how you came to acquire those buildings and what kind of sacrifices and what kind of effort has it taken to get them where you were at the beginning to where you are now.

Wallace: Well, when we, we found the building, it was an abandoned building. And all they had in it was garbage debris, dead dogs. It was a furniture warehouse. And we set up a chair and a table and set in there, and what they call squatter's rights. [Laughter] And we ended up taking the building. And I went to Donald Tucker, councilman Donald Tucker, and he sent a gentleman up there to appraise what the building was worth. Meanwhile, they had put the building on the auction block. And through the help of God, I went down and bidded on the building and nobody bid on the building but me. And it was eight thousand dollars. I didn't have no eight thousand dollars. I had to come back to some friends of mine and borrow the money. And they just happened to loan me the money. And that's how we end up getting the building. And then the young people, and then we had to take out all the debris and knock down walls, put up walls. And to see young girls, young boys do the type of work that had to be done in that building, to get it halfway in shape, it was amazing. It was amazing to see. Now they come back and they reminisce on how the building looks. They say, I remember when. And a lot of the young people that helped with the building, that was part of the program, now bring their kids to the program.

Q: How many buildings you say you have now?

Wallace: Now, we have five buildings. And really out of space.

Q: Now tell me some of the specifics about the programs that you're running in the complex now.



Wallace: Okay. We have one program called Young Parents. This is young girls, who are on welfare, who get assistance, that have to get into a program to teach them how to take care of their babies or their kids. How to feed them, how to go to school and see that they're doing all right in school. That's one program. And teach them work skills too. Teach them to go out and get a job. Another one is School to Work. This is young people from the age of like twenty up. We try to help them get their GED. Try to help them to get a, go to college. Try to teach them a trade. Okay. That's School to Work. Basically, School to Work and the Youth Corps program is basically the same. The young people have dropped out of school. They get a little stipend though from the Youth Corps. They have dropped out of school for whatever reason, and we got them back. And to see them really sitting there trying to do this work is amazing. And to see them come every day. We're open five days a week. And they're there five days a week. They have to be there quarter to nine, the latest. And they be there.

Q: What kind of staff do you have to do run the programs that you have?

Wallace: Nowhere enough. We have one, two, three. Now we have social workers too there. And, you know, the kids come in with a lot of problems. And we have to deal with it. We have about eighteen people on staff which it needs in the neighborhood of forty people on staff that we really need.

Q: Do you have any volunteers? People who come and volunteer their time.

Wallace: That's how International Youth Organization started. But if you're during the day, people can't volunteer no more like they used to. Because they can't afford it. Basically when I get a volunteer to come to the center, they'll volunteer for maybe a week, two weeks, and then all of a sudden you find out they want to be hired, which is no more than right. But we don't have it. And that's, the volunteer, we get, we ask the parents to volunteer at least, what is it, four hours a month, that's an hour a week. And most of the time they can't do that.

Q: So if you're not in a position to pay people, they don't stay.

Wallace: No. They can't afford to stay. And it's going to be worse no sooner than this welfare reform comes through.

Q: Yeah. We anticipate that. Aside from being a consumer of regular goods and services, in what ways have you participated in the economic life of the community?

Wallace: We participate as far as trying to get the young people off the corners, selling drugs, mugging people, whatever, to get them something positive to do.

Q: You told us about a bar that you had owned at one time. Did you ever own any other business after the bar?

Wallace: No. No.

Q: Did you ever buy stock in any black business?

Wallace: No. No.

Q: When you first came to Newark, how did you get information on the news and events of the community, especially what was happening with black folk in Newark? Did you read a black newspaper? If so, which one. Did you listen to a black oriented radio? If so, which one?

Wallace: Well, there was a black newspaper in Newark. Was it After Hours? What was the name of that paper?

Q: The Afro-American was one.

Wallace: The Afro-American.

Q: And After Hours was another.

Wallace: Yes. The Afro-American was the big paper.

Q: Right.

Wallace: And we had WNJR. Wasn't that we had television. Nobody had no television in those days. But WNJR and the Afro-American newspaper. And then people talked.

Q: Right.

Wallace: People talked to each other. They wasn't too busy to hold a conversation.

Q: What was the relationship between black Newark and other black communities in New Jersey?

Wallace: I don't know. I don't know.

Q: For instance, like East Orange which is right adjacent to Newark on one side. Hillside on another. Maplewood.

Wallace: And Irvington.

Q: Right.

Wallace: Used to be a lot of whites up there and a few blacks.

Q: Did you ever visit any blacks in any other communities?

Wallace: I used to go to Irvington. Vauxhall where I used to go a lot. Because we used to play a lot of baseball up there. I used to go up to Vauxhall a lot.

Q: What outstanding blacks did you meet or hear of in Newark?

Wallace: Well, Irving Turner, Timiny Steel, who else.

Q: What about professional people, were there doctors or any other, school teachers or?

Wallace: There was, I can't think of the name, a doctor used to be across the street from the Brick Towers. A black doctor. Johnson, Charlie Johnson. You know him, right?

Q: You spoke quite at length about Brick Towers. Precisely what is or what was Brick Towers?

Wallace: Brick Towers a complex, apartment building. Two buildings. 716 and 685 High Street. And how I got there, my wife worked in there. And that's where most of our people were moving at the time was in those high rise buildings.

Q: What do you remember about blacks in the police department, or fire fighters or social workers in Newark?

Wallace: I know George Apple and Slim O'Neill. That was the policemen that I know. We didn't basically have that many black police I don't think. Because I never had any. Well, I didn't have no problems with them. That's why I didn't know them, you know. You would still feel like you were known as Slim O'Neill, you were known to stay out of his way. And George Apple which had been around a long time. Used to talk to him, but you can't kid with an officer, a police officer.

Q: Do you remember whether there were any blacks in the fire department when you first came

here?

Wallace: I think that. I don't know, but I think, what's his name, Charlie Harris. I think he was the first black fireman, and then you had Thomas. I don't know his name. Thomas. And I think there was about three or four black firemen at that time, but I don't remember their names.

Q: What about social workers? When I say social workers, I mean those persons who worked in the Welfare Department and provided services to people who were on public assistance at that time.

Wallace: Well, the only thing I know. I had a very bad experience with one of them. A lady, we were walking down the street on Springfield Avenue, I'll never forget, this lady almost fell against the fence. And I caught her and asked her, you know, what's wrong. She said, I got to get home. I'm sick and I got to get, I think she said her heart medicine or something. So I ended up taking her home. And she went and got her medicine and whatever and took it and sat down for a while. Then she told me you have to leave. You have to leave. And I said, lady, are you all right? She said, yeah, but you got to leave. By the time, I didn't know why, by the time I got ready to leave, a knock came on the door. And it was a case worker. And you could see the expression on her face how scared she was cause I was there. And the lady comes in and she looks around, real evil, mean looking lady, black lady. And her first words was what are you doing in here? And I had to explain to her about. She told me that she didn't care for me to get out of that apartment. But that's the only one I had any connections with. And as far as I'm concerned, it was a very bad connection.

Q: But for the most part, the social workers who did serve the people on welfare at the time, they were primarily black people.

Wallace: I don't know. But the way I understand it, some people say they was. I don't know.

Q: That was the only one that you.

Wallace: That was the only one that I met and I didn't want to meet no more.

Q: When you or others in your neighborhood got in trouble or needed help to solve a problem, to whom in Newark did they go?

Wallace: Well, I think we're going back to the district leader. We're going back to the district leader again.

Q: No. I mean in pre-political days when you first came to Newark. If there were people who needed help of any kind, who did they go to?

Wallace: The preacher.

Q: Okay. How effective were they in getting the help that people needed?

Wallace: I think they were very helpful. I didn't run into that situation myself. I think they were very helpful. Because at that time, the churches were doing great for people.

Q: Why do you suppose that people would turn to the minister if they got in trouble or if they needed help of any kind?

Wallace: Because he was the one that seemed to be able to help them at that time more better than anybody else.

Q: How was black Newark perceived? Was the community seen as a slum? What I mean by that how did black people regard each other, number one? How do you think white people regarded black folk in Newark? And the areas where black people lived, were they considered as being



ghettos or slums at the time?

Wallace: Well, I think that word ghetto the same race of people living together. Now, I know South Orange Avenue, when I was living on South Orange Avenue, you had to keep in front of your house clean. And the person next door kept the front of their house clean. I don't know now. Here lately, a long time, I see a whole lot of garbage and stuff in Newark. South Orange Avenue stayed clean. And people did it together. The gentleman I was telling you about, the shoe shine parlor, I was trying to think of their name. Every morning he was out there sweeping. Then in the afternoon or something somebody else be sweeping, or I be sweeping. You swept your halls down. You washed your steps down. I tell you back when I was coming up, it was clean. It don't look like it do now.

Q: So nobody thought of the black community as being any less than any other community?

Wallace: No. Well, at least I didn't. Because every time I came out, somebody was handing me a broom or something and saying sweep.

Q: Did all classes of African-Americans live close to you? That is, professional people like doctors or school teachers or politicians, did they live in the same neighborhood.

END SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE; BEGIN SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

Q: Good morning, again, Mr. Wallace, and thank you for coming back to complete our interview. Today is April 24 and I'm here at my residence again with Mr. Wallace. So Mr. Wallace, when we were here last time, the last question I had asked you was about the residents of the neighborhood where you lived. And I had asked you did all classes of African-Americans live close to you? If so, how did they get along with each other? And I identified those persons as people from both ends of the spectrum as far as income, education, and lack of education, or people who did not have the higher paying jobs. So did all of those kinds of people live in the same neighborhood

together?

Wallace: Well, I would say yes. Because I know Mr. Church, the school director, they lived in the neighborhood. They lived on Bergen Street. You have Wiggins, he's the fellow who taxed the people. We had a cleaners, people who owned the cleaners, they lived in the neighborhood. In fact, we had some lawyers that lived in our neighborhood. And we just had some everyday people that were going to work, doing housework, they lived in the neighborhood. Yes. We all lived together. We got along together. We all related to each other. Whether you was educated or not, we related to each other. Yes. We lived together, and we prayed together.

Q: Good. Other than white store owners and other whites with a vested economic interest, do you recall any other whites having an interest in the black community?

Wallace: Well, they owned the little corner grocery stores. Back in those days, we had some blacks that owned little corner stores too. The mama and papa stores that we related to. Yes. There was other white businesses in our neighborhood. We had the restaurant equipment on South Orange Avenue, which there was a white lady that owned that business. But it didn't make any difference. We still got along together with each other.

Q: Did the white folk who lived in the neighborhood or had the businesses in the neighborhood or the political establishment downtown or the white merchants downtown, did they seem to show any interest in the welfare of African-Americans, whether they lived in the community or not? Did they care about how people lived or how they got along, or did they make any effort to make life better for the black folk?

Wallace: Well, the only thing that they maybe did was give you a job. And I guess by them giving you a job, I guess they thought you'd make your own life better.

Q: Did you shop downtown? If so, at which stores and why did you shop there?

Wallace: Well, one of the reasons that's the only place I could shop. I didn't have a car to be able to get around. And it wasn't, see all the stores wasn't out in the mall like they are today. You had your downtown. Your Bamberger's and your, which I'll never forget, there was a store down there called Door's Shoe Store that we shopped a lot. Harbor Hats. Yes. We did most of our shopping at that time on Broad and Market all the time.

Q: What do you consider to have been Newark's best stores?

Wallace: Bamberger's, Klein's, Woolworth's Five and Ten Store.

Q: Do you remember any racial incidents involving racial discrimination in Newark?

Wallace: Oh yeah. Even back in those days, when you went in the stores, you were treated different than the white person that came in the store. You walk around the store, they would watch you. I mean, that was just part of it. They would watch you walking around the store. Sometimes they would actually follow you around the store.

Q: What about outside the stores in the general neighborhood or in the general downtown area? Did you notice any discrimination, for instance, like the theaters or if you went to sports arenas and what not, did you notice any racial?

Wallace: I remember on Broad Street, what was the name of that movie, the Rialto. It was on Broad Street. You actually had to sit upstairs. You had to sit upstairs. And there was no two ways about that. I know, what was that, Loews?

Q: Loews Theater. Yeah that was up on the upper end of Broad Street.

Wallace: Yeah, you had to sit upstairs there too. Yes.

Q: Oh. We had lots of theaters in Newark. There was another one on.

Wallace: Adams.

Q: And the Branford.

Wallace: The Branford.

Q: And there was another one right there on, just below Broad Street on Market, going toward Penn Station. It was on the left side.

Wallace: Yeah. I remember that movie. But didn't go there too much because crazy stuff went on in that movie all the time. There was a movies up on Belmont Avenue. Most of your blacks went there. I can't think of the name of that movie. There was a movie up on Belmont Avenue right off of Spruce Street.

Q: And also there was another one on Broad Street further down. I remember that one because there was a guy, a black guy, who killed a man inside that theater. I don't remember what the name of it was.

Wallace: That was the Rialto.

Q: The Rialto I thought was right there at Branford Place. And there was one, there was a theater there too.

Wallace: No, that was down by, right across from City Hall, the Rialto.

Q: What do you remember or do you remember who was referred to as the Mayor of Springfield Avenue?

Wallace: Oh. Oh, what was his name? Homer Jenkins.

Q: Okay.

Wallace: Homer Jenkins.

Q: Why did they call him the Mayor of Springfield Avenue?

Wallace: Because basically, every time you see somebody or want to do something, you would go to Homer Jenkins and talk to him. Homer would stay dressed up all the time and walking up and down Springfield Avenue. He was in the gospel business. He had a record shop. Sell gospel music.

Q: You know, I have asked everyone that I've interviewed who this person was, and you are the second person who identified him as being the owner of that record store. Some people say Hogan Jenkins, some say Homer Jenkins, and some Homan Jenkins. So, anyway, we know it was Mr. Jenkins, the record shop owner who was the Mayor of Springfield Avenue. What do you remember regarding such local personalities as William Ashby, who was an early black social worker and also the founder of the Urban League of Essex County; and Meyer Ellingstein, who was Newark's first Jewish mayor; Prosper Brewer, who was Newark's first black policeman; Irving Turner, Newark's first black elected official. So, do you remember any or all of those people?

Wallace: I remember Irving Turner very well. His office, he was the first black councilperson. And Jack Hicks and all of them got him in office. I remember having an incident with a young lady about her welfare check, and I ended up taking her to Irving Turner. And he helped her get her welfare check. They was holding her check for whatever reason, and he called there and talked to somebody, and the next thing I know he was, the young lady was told to go and pick up her check.

Q: What about the other people I mentioned like Meyer Ellingstein and Prosper Brewer, the first black policeman?

Wallace: I didn't know that much about them, especially. I wasn't involved in politics at that time the way I am now.

Q: What do you remember regarding black institutions like hospitals or hotels or hotels or banks in Newark, and where were they located?

Wallace: There was only one thing that I know anything about. As far as I remember back in those days, whether there was a black bank. The only thing I know about was the hospital. They called it City Hospital. And that's where all your blacks went. That's the only thing I know anything about an institution. There wasn't any banks.

Q: The hospital, the City Hospital was not black owned. That was a city institution, I believe. But I mean hospitals that might have been owned or operated by blacks for blacks.

Wallace: I don't know of any.

Q: What do you remember regarding the kinds of music that one heard in black Newark?

Wallace: Well, mostly we heard the blues. There was no such thing as rap back in those days. You heard people like Ella Fitzgerald. You heard jazz. But basically, mostly I heard was gospel music.

Q: Do you remember listening to and/or seeing musicians perform jazz or gospel or the blue and at what places did they perform?

Wallace: They had a place called Teddie Powell's. Billie Holliday. Either the, oh what did they

call that, the Mosque Theater.

Q: Mosque. Yeah.

Wallace: And they performed there. Ella Fitzgerald was there. And then you had a place on Springfield Avenue called the Lyric Bar.

Q: The Mosque Theater then was what is now Symphony Hall and the Terrace Ballroom downstairs, is that right?

Wallace: Right.

Q: In what leisure time activities, for instance, like singing or story telling, or gardening, or movies, playing sports, did you participate in any of those kinds of things?

Wallace: Well, I played baseball. Well, it wasn't baseball, softball. And things like that. I didn't do any gardening because I always went to the store and bought my vegetables. But I loved softball. I tried a little bit of boxing at one time. That didn't work. [Laughter]

Q: What do you remember about the Newark Eagles, or do you remember anything about the Newark Eagles, and did you attend any of their games?

Wallace: No. I never attended any of the Newark Eagles' games. But Don Newcomb, we started Don Newcomb from playing softball. Don Newcomb used to play basketball a lot. But we got him involved. So we had a game with somebody, and we didn't have no pitcher. And him being so big and we thought he was strong, he could throw the ball fast, so we got him, and we won the game.

Q: Were there other black athletic or sports events that you attended aside from the softball or?



Wallace: Boxing.

Q: Okay.

Wallace: That was about the type of sports that we attended in those days. Boxing and baseball.

Q: What do you recall regarding what we refer to as the seamy side of black life in Newark? And when I say the seamy side, that means that people who did things that were not necessarily on the up and up or legal, like prostitution or numbers running or drug, you know, dealing and etc, and etc.

Wallace: Yeah. That was a way of surviving for some people back in those days. You had Howard Street, Montgomery Street. That's where your nightclubs were, your Howard Bar. There was another bar there called it the M&M I think it was. That mostly your nightlife people hung out at Howard Street. But even with those people back in those days, they respected you. I mean, like, they shot a lot of dice on the corners. And if you as a young lady come by, was not involved in that type of livelihood, they would stop. They'd wait for you to go by. It's not like it is today. They really respect you. If you, we had a lot of winos. And if you were a young person going to school and they sat out there drinking their wine and you stopped, they would make you get away from them. Tell you, you're going to school. You know. They respected you.

Q: What about prostitution? Was prostitution rampant then as it is now or as it has been over the last few years?

Wallace: Yes. It was. But then, like I said, it was out there, it was rampant, but it had respect with it. They didn't walk up to a person, you know, like the girls do now. They had respect. Like that book Howard Street that was wrote, that was wrote about what was going on on Howard Street. Which was true. But I still say, it's not what you do, but how you do it.

Q: Right.

Wallace: Okay. And they had a lot of respect for themselves.

Q: What do you recall regarding public education in Newark, and how well did black kids perform?

Wallace: Back in those days, kids performed very well. Cause you had to go, they had what they called a truant officer. If you weren't in school at a certain time, at a certain time that truant officer would come to your house and get you and take you to school. But that fell apart. Then they got to the point, and then your mother or your father, if you had a mother and father in the house, or you had your mother, would make sure you went to school. Or your next door neighbor would make sure you went to school. Because you had people that looked out for each other. That's how we got along back in those days so good. That's why we didn't worry about a whole lot of people getting robbed because everybody knew everybody, and everybody looked out for everybody.

Q: How do you think black students in Newark schools were treated by white teachers and white students?

Wallace: Bad. Because, you know, they always want to be superior over us. And they were treated bad, but at the same time, the young people went to school to learn. They didn't go for the white student to like them or for the teacher to like them. They went to get what the teacher had, an education. And a lot of them graduated. I mean, you can see that by, I guess, by our elected officials and our black business people that came out of Newark. That's what they went for, their education.

Q: Were black students involved in extramural sports and/or extracurricular activities, and what black teachers do you recall? Let's start with sports. Did black kids play basketball and baseball

right along with white kids or whatever other kind of sports they might have had?

Wallace: Well, if they wanted to win the game, whatever they were playing, outside I guess they would say hockey or something like that, they had to get black kids to play. Cause we could really play sports, all kind of sports. And that's basically what they used us for.

Q: What kind of other extracurricular activities did black kids engage in?

Wallace: Music.

Q: Yeah.

Wallace: We had music. And believe it or not, we had some bright kids that went to school and learned, what do you call that, poetry or?

Q: Poetry.

Wallace: Yeah.

Q: Yeah.

Wallace: And a lot of them went to school, I know like Montgomery Street School, a lot of our kids went to school for trades. For building, electrician, and they did it.

Q: Now I want you to think about this question carefully. Don't answer it in a hurry, think about it before you answer. What would you consider to be the five most important events or developments that have occurred in Newark during your residence here? For example, strikes, political elections, the riot, major fires, natural disasters such as snow storms or tornadoes, etc, and black immigration, people coming into Newark in large numbers from the south or other places

outside Newark. What among those would you consider to be the five most important developments in Newark?

Wallace: Well, the first one I would say would be the night Ken Gibson got elected as Mayor of the City of Newark. To see people, lots of people, on Broad Street, celebrating to see the first black mayor. That was very, very important. The other things, to see Stella Wright, I would particularly say Stella Wright. To see the projects get blowed up and town houses put into place. That's very important because you just cannot put lots of people like a bunch of cows together. I don't care whether they're white, black or whatever, it just don't work. So that's two of them that I think was very important. To see people come together to settle problems, to try to settle problems in the City of Newark. Dr. Johnson, who is a baby doctor at the College in Jersey City, it's very important to see what happened with him. So, you know, there are so many good things happening out here to black folks.

Q: Tell me about Dr. Johnson? What did happen with him?

Wallace: Well, he, what he's a brain surgeon for babies. He was the first young black man that is recognized all over the world as a top brain surgeon. So, you know, and by me just having the pleasure of meeting him, it was really exciting to me.

Q: Do you remember any major fires or like natural disasters such as snow storms, etc.?

Wallace: Yeah. On the corner of Rose Street and Bergen, from Grove Street to Avon Avenue, around, that whole community burnt up. I can't remember the exact year. But to see all those buildings, all them people getting put outdoors. And then the bad part about it is they were trying to get their stuff out of the house, television whatever they had, and to see people stealing it. It was outrageous.

Q: What about, do you remember any big snow storms that kind of paralyzed the city?

Wallace: What was that, nineteen, oh, I don't remember the year. But there was a big snow storm that paralyzed this city for quite a while. And it was back in the, what was it seventy something. I don't remember the exact date, but, yes, I remember that.

Q: Did you play any role, large or small, in any of these things you mention?

Wallace: Yeah, in the fire on Bergen Street. What they called the riot. The riot, I was on the corner of Springfield Avenue and Seventh Street, myself and another gentlemen, a kid came through, a white boy, with an ice cream. And they dragged him out of the truck and started beating him up. And we went over and stopped it and put him back in the truck and got him out of the neighborhood.

Q: In what major ways has Newark changed since you first arrived here, and how do you view the changes that have taken place?

Wallace: Some good, some bad. And as I was saying about the projects we tore down or blowed up or whatever, and put in townhouses. Make people feel like they belong to something, you know, not bunched up high over each other.

Q: What about, you mentioned the experience of having Mr. Gibson elected as the first black mayor for Newark, what kind of changes have occurred for black folk in Newark since Gibson became mayor?

Wallace: Well, people put in jobs or positions, or whatever you want to call it, where they wasn't put in before. I mean, I know we have a black business administration of the City of Newark. We didn't have that before. Okay. We have black people running the health department. We didn't have before. We have a black man named Cooper, I think his name is. I met him last night at a meeting who is very concerned about cleaning the City of Newark. It was a very nice pleasure to meet. He wouldn't have had that job if there had been any other nationality or color in there, in

the office. Because everybody have a tendency, for whatever reason, to take care of their own.

Q: I don't remember. Did you tell me during our first interview that you were born down south or you were born in?

Wallace: Philadelphia.

Q: In Philadelphia. Okay. So you would not have any basis of comparison between life in Newark and what happened down in the south.

Wallace: No more than when I was in the service, in the Army, and stationed down in Biloxi, Mississippi. I could see the difference in down south and up north. And let me tell you, to me there really wasn't that much difference. Because there were certain places up north you couldn't go, and there were certain places down south that you couldn't go. So, you know, I guess it weighed it, at least down south you know you couldn't go there.

Q: And the big difference perhaps might have been, in my experience because I was born and raised in the south, I was a young adult when I came to New York State to live, you knew exactly where white folks stood in the south. But here, it was subtle.

Wallace: That's right. They would take what they wanted out of you, but wouldn't give you anything. Like I say, when I was stationed down in Biloxi, there were certain places I know I couldn't go. And they would make it very plain to you that they didn't want you there.

Q: What traditions or celebrations or events in Newark that you witnessed in the past that no longer exist, and what happened to them, and how do you feel about their disappearance? What kinds of things, celebrations or community activities, or whatever there was in Newark that we benefited from or that we participated in that no longer exist?

Wallace: I'm trying to think. I know we had the Black Heritage Day Parade. There's none I can think of. The only one that I could think that we do not talk about, like the Jewish people talk about the Holocaust. They talk about the Holocaust every year around Easter time you'll hear about it. We don't talk anything about what happened to us, slavery. How they brought us over here on the boats. How they're so many black people in the bottom of the sea. We don't talk about that. We act like we're ashamed of it. But the Jewish people, every time you turn around, they're talking about the Holocaust. They make sure that their kids know about it. Our kids, for some reason, we don't want to let people know that we were slaves. And in a sense we still are slaves. I think all of us so-called leaders and what else need to get together and let our kids know what happened to our people, and really talk about it.

Q: Well, that could generate a, perhaps a very controversial, philosophical discussion in terms of why we do not talk about it, and what the consequences would be if we talked about it. And perhaps the most important thing would be how we talked about it.

Wallace: That's true, but.

Q: And the reason I say that, Jim, is because when I taught high school at Arts High, I remember very well how black kids responded to anything that had to do with the mistreatment of black folk by white folk, whether it was slavery or whether it was the then current social relationships between blacks and whites. And the whole welfare thing. And I remember how ashamed that black teenagers were that their families were on welfare. They didn't like that. They didn't like to talk about that. And like I said, I remember how bitter they would become whenever a discussion came up. So I stayed away from those kinds of things.

Wallace: But at the same time, I believe the old saying that, see you know where you're coming from, you'll never know where you're going. Okay. And it would become bitter, but until our young people understand they are beautiful young people, they can learn, but until they know exactly who they are, they're not going to be able to deal with reality.



Q: That's why I say if we talk about it, it depends on how we talk about it. The kind of information that we give to young people, and being very, very careful to warn against negative reactions to those kinds of.

Wallace: Oh yes. No. No. I'm not talking about saying negative reaction to it. I'm talking about the Jewish people and the Holocaust. They start teaching their kids about the Holocaust at six years old, maybe younger. And it's bringing up to them as they come. You know.

Q: Okay. This to me is another very important question. When do you feel black life in Newark reached its highest peak, and what was so great about that time?

Wallace: I don't feel that right to today that we've reached our highest peak.

Q: But the highest peak that we have reached, given where we came from and to where we are now --

Wallace: Yes.

Q: --what do you think was the highest peak?

Wallace: Well, I still go back to our first mayor, our first black mayor. Some of my so-called business people, black business people, Jim Feldman. He came up from a shoe shop box to be one of our wealthiest blacks in this part of the country. Our president, Nathaniel Parks, was the person on the west side. I know, some of the ministers is very prominent, very helpful. We have a, but we had a young man, Buster Simmons, young man, preacher.

Q: Buster Soares.

Wallace: No, Buster Simmons.

Q: Simmons.

Wallace: And Buster Soares too, both of them.

Q: Yeah, I don't remember Simmons.

Wallace: Yeah, Buster Simmons. He had, what's the name of his church, Newborn. And he's very active out here with young people. People like that is have reached real pedestal. And then you have people our here that we don't know about that reach out and help people every day.

Q: Okay, now, can you identify what was the best thing that happened for black Newark in general as a result of those persons having been here and the experiences that they had? Do you think that it helped the community?

END SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO; BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO

Q: Mr. Wallace, I had just asked you when did you think black life in Newark reached its highest peak and what was good about that time? And you talked about some several black people who had achieved, I would say the extraordinary, in the City of Newark for that time. And my question to you was what effect do you think that their achievements had on the overall black community.

Wallace: As I said back there, that's a hard question because, I only know is that, the only one that I can really speak on is Buster Simmons. Buster Simmons has the church on Nineteenth Street. I went there and I saw what he was doing. He helping a lot of young people. I'm talking about young people in the church. My wife went there Sunday, and she was saying about, and his choir, he's got little people. And they was sitting up there. They wasn't listening to the music teacher; they were looking at their robes. They were so impressed with their robes. You know, that might not seem a lot to people, but to those kids it's a big, that meant a lot. Because those are the kids that I'm not going to see in the jails or in the graveyards too early.

Q: Is Reverend Simmons still there?

Wallace: Buster Simmons? Yeah, he's still there.

Q: Oh. What do you feel, when do you feel life in Newark reached its lowest point and what was so bad about that particular time?

Wallace: When I see thousands and thousands of homeless people. When I see people don't have anything to eat. When I see the shelters. Those are the kinds of things. When I see thousands and thousands of people who don't have jobs. You know. That's sad. I know years ago when I was coming up we probably didn't have much, but we had something. And these people don't have anything. I was on Elizabeth Avenue the other night at White Castle, and I was getting something to eat. And a young lady come up with two kids and asked me could I buy them something to eat. You know, I mean, these was kids like five and six years old. And those are the kind of things that I think is bad.

Q: So then you would think that in many ways today is as low as life in Newark has gone.

Wallace: As far as I can remember. As far as I can remember.

Q: What do you recall regarding Louise Scott? Did you know Mrs. Scott?

Wallace: Oh yes. Louise, yes. I know Louise Scott when she was on Montgomery Street. She had a beauty parlor over there. Then she moved into, what's that the Krueger building?

Q: Yeah. The Krueger Mansion.

Wallace: Mansion. And Louise had, she had a school to teach young ladies how to do hair. And what I liked about Louise was, whether the young lady had the money or not, she would take her

in and help her. And see Louise had all these different type of hair styles she used to wear. But that would advertise her business I think. No, Louise was, I think she was a very good influence with the young ladies in the City of Newark.

Q: Did you ever have any personal, you know, meetings or, you know, with her?

Wallace: Yes. I had, well, lunch at when she was on Montgomery Street and Barclay I think it was. I used to work in the shoe store right up the street from where she lived at. And we used to talk all the time.

Q: What do you think the community's perception was of her?

Wallace: I didn't have, don't have any idea. Unless some of the people from the neighborhood got to know her, she was a very nice lady. That's all I think they could see of her.

Q: Did you ever go to the mansion after she moved there?

Wallace: Well, a couple of times. Not frequently, a couple of times.

Q: What do you know about the High Street area where the Krueger-Scott Mansion is located?

Wallace: Well, what I know. I used to live at 685 High Street, Brick Towers. I used to live there. And when I was living there. Well, Brick Towers used to be a hospital. Okay.

Q: That was St. Barnabas.

Wallace: St. Barnabas used to be there. Then Brick Towers came and I moved there. And that was a very nice neighborhood. It was a very nice neighborhood at that time. And I remember years going back you had to be a wealthy person to live on High Street. But for some reason or

another, it declined so bad. In fact, my programs International Youth Organization started at Brick Towers on High Street. The Red Cross headquarters was on High Street. You had a lot of problems in places on High Street.

Q: Did you or anyone you know ever work for any of those wealthy people that you talk about who lived on High Street?

Wallace: No. I don't know anyone that worked for.

Q: Did you know anything about any of the occupants before Louise bought the Scott-Krueger Mansion, the Krueger Mansion?

Wallace: No.

Q: How would you sum up your experience of living in Newark?

Wallace: Very, very educational. Very educational. To the thing from the time before the riots, to the riots, after the riots. See people come and go. See good people, bad people. A lot of experience. And knowing how to relate to the people that you met. Business people, lawyers, doctors, the average person on the street, the drug addict, drug pusher. You had, in my life I had to be able to walk between all of them because I had to be out there and I had to relate to them. Yes. So really it's a bigger city. You could never buy it. You could never pay for it.

Q: If you had your life to live over, would you live in Newark and why or why not?

Wallace: Well, I would live in Newark. I would live in Newark because it's like I said before, a very good, a good experience. Good and bad experiences in Newark. I've seen things grow. I've seen things fall into. You know, Newark is, they said at one time that if you couldn't make it in Newark, you couldn't make it nowhere.

Q: Yeah. I've heard that.

Wallace: And I still believe that. It might look like, like I spoke about all the people homeless and things like that. But see, we got to realize one other thing too, a lot of people came to Newark that was homeless and whatever. They didn't live here. They came from different places. Like you said before, a lot of people that live in Newark now was on their way to New York, but when the train conductor said Newark, they thought he said New York and they got off. You know. And they stopped here, and we just didn't have the facilities to take care of them.

Q: Okay. Is there anything that I did not cover in this interview that you would like to tell me about yourself?

Wallace: Well, the one thing about myself. I'm very fortunate, Miss Brickus. I'm fortunate to the point that a lot of people don't know what they're put on this earth for. I have the odds on a lot of people. I know why I'm here. And I know I'm here through the grace of God to help other people. To do what I can for other people. To try to put them on the right road to their lives. And a lot of people have a lot going for them. You know. So one of the things that I'm here for to help people.

Q: Mr. Wallace, can you think of one or two or more young people who came through IYO that became successful or are still in Newark?

Wallace: Oh, I can mention a whole lot of them. You have Claude Melvin, who is executive director of United Community Corporation. You have Chas Holme who worked at the hospital. You have Harris, who worked in the fire department. Otis Johnson in the fire department. You have Fahim Harris is who is the captain of the fire department now. Yes. And still a lot more. I just can't think of all their names. We have a young lady who nurses. One young lady I know, I can't really think of her name, who's going to school to be a doctor. I have a young lady working at the office going to school to be a lawyer. So, yes. But see, the only thing with me, I count

those blessings, but I count the James Moore. Young man named James Moore that him and another young man killed a man up on C Place. And they went to jail for life. I count those kind of things. I count them to the point where did I go wrong. I mean, I took five steps. Should I have took six. You know, people say, well, look at all the young people that you saved. But I count the ones that got lost. Because there was something there that we didn't deal with. But I don't give up.

Q: What do you think inspired Mr. Wallace, or influenced you to become what you are now, or the man that you have been these, over these years?

Wallace: That's good. That's good. Another older man, like I am now. I was always anxious, like these kids. That's why I know. And I could have been in jail or dead too. But it took an old man to show me the right way. It's worth it. Believe me it is. Because, like as I said, if it hadn't been for that old man, I don't know where I'd be.

Q: Last question, what are your aspirations for your future and the future of the City of Newark?

Wallace: Helping people. Getting people to help themselves. That's all I want. I want to see people help themselves. I want people to be able to walk down the street wherever and see somebody walking toward them and see people on the side, and walk up to them and say hello. That's all I want. When we get back to that, then we'll start living like people.

Q: Well, I want to thank you, Mr. Wallace, for having come both times to complete this interview. And as I usually say to people, I've known you for quite a few years, and I feel I know you better now after having gone through this interview. And I think I like what I see.

Wallace: Okay.

Q: Okay. And again thank you so much for having come.



Wallace: I want to tell you Miss Brickus I've been so busy, I guess you'd say doing nothing, but there's a lot of nothing out there. And I want to thank you for inviting me.

END OF INTERVIEW